

MLL School Research Report

Thornhill Elementary 1st and 2nd Grade School Report: Music Circles and Social-Emotional Development

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Introduction and Rationale

Established in 1958, Thornhill Elementary School is located in the North Oakland hills area in a low-density neighborhood with many trees, giving it a park-like setting. Nearby is the Montclair business district. Thornhill Elementary School currently enrolls approximately 360 children in kindergarten through fifth grade and offers three classes for kindergarten through 3rd grade, two classes for 4th and 5th grades, and one Special Day Class. The student population includes gifted, English Language Learners, special needs, and at-risk students of different ethnic backgrounds. Thornhill staff includes 17 full-time classroom teachers, of which one hundred percent are credentialed.

Thornhill Elementary School is in its 5th year as a member of the Music Integration Literacy Enhancement (MILE) Program that was established in 2004 by the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) to ensure the survival of music education when the OUSD was forced to cut millions from the budget. In response, the MILE set the following goals: (1) to establish music as a core academic subject (“music for music’s sake”) *and* as a springboard to other academic subjects; (2) to form collaborative partnerships with classroom teachers, administrators, and artists; (3) to design and implement engaging, integrated music curricula that support student achievement and learning in all academic areas; (4) to document student learning to provide evidence of learning across academic subject areas; and (5) to maintain the Instrumental Music Program in Grades 4-5. (For more background on this project, see music.ousd.k12.ca.us/mile and Swihart 2008, in the *MLL Sourcebook*).

As a member of MILE and the MIENC, Thornhill’s continuing mission is to expand M+MI projects out into the school and other schools in the district with the partnership of local arts learning organizations (MuST), partner laboratory schools (San Francisco and Ravenswood School District Learning Laboratory Schools), and support and guidance from the Music-in-Education National Consortium (New England Conservatory Research Center). This year, Thornhill expanded a music circle program into three Oakland Unified Schools (Brookfield Elementary, Bella Vista Elementary, and Burckhalter Elementary) and refined existing programs at the school, including the 4th grade musical and the 5th grade Jazz and Democracy Unit. This report will detail the scale-out model used for the music circle program.

Research Question

Thornhill is thus in its fifth year researching how music plus music-integrated teaching practices enhance student achievement by integrating music learning with other academic and socio-emotional learning processes. One new area Thornhill wanted to focus on this year was the socio-emotional learning of its students, specifically how they develop character values and discover successful ways of getting along with each other. After learning about the music circle program at the Ramsey school in Minneapolis (See *JMIE III*, 2007 and the 2009 Ramsey School Report), Thornhill decided to set up a program that asked, *how can music be used as a socio-emotional intervention for students in first and second grade classrooms?*

Theoretical Framework

After designing a program with the help of Eric Swihart, Alyson Swihart, and Carol Larimore, and with financial support from Music in Schools Today, the program was piloted not only at Thornhill but also at three other OUSD schools—Brookfield, Burkhalter, and Bella Vista Elementary—all of which are at risk.

The music circle program’s professional development plan modeled the Artist-Teacher-Scholar-Action Researcher framework. Teachers learned concepts that included: Shared Fundamental Concepts, how to form an inquiry question, and what type of assessments and unit plans would successfully measure the results of this program.

This project was documented through a digital portfolio in order to share this project with other LLSN sites and scale-out schools as a part of the MIENC’s Music Learning Leadership certificate program (See Thornhill digital Portfolio)

Study Design, Implementation, and Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This project was designed to enable classroom teachers to learn about music plus music integration through a pre-designed M+MI program. It was hoped that this program would allow teachers to see the effects music plus music integration practices had on their students and would thus create ‘buy-in’ among the teachers, so that in future years they could create their own M+MI projects. Therefore, in coordination with Music in Schools Today and the Clorox Foundation, the OUSD Music Department offered a “Music Circle” Project to four schools as part of an intra-district “Scale-Out” Initiative. The Teaching Artist was Carol Larimore (1991), whose curriculum “Music is a Gift of Love” teaches kids about the “Flowers in the Garden of Success.”

Participating schools received funding for a 12-week residency, 3 professional development sessions, 1 culminating event, and teacher stipends. These schools were invited to participate in a Summer Institute to build the capacity of the classroom teachers and principals to continue this work once the residency was complete. One teacher from each of the participating schools attended the Summer Institute.

Eric Swihart began each professional development with a musical game and/or activity that the classroom teacher could use in his/her classroom. Next, Carol Larimore discussed her

curriculum and demonstrated how to use it. Finally, Alyson Swihart discussed the MIENC and theoretical implications of curriculum design and program documentation.

In addition to this teacher professional development, each student received the “Music is a Gift of Love” curriculum, consisting of 2 CDs and an activity book. The 26 songs in the curriculum correspond to 26 character values, each represented by a “Flower in the Garden of Successful Choices.” The curriculum teaches character values and social-emotional vocabulary through music. The classroom teacher received a 26-unit curriculum to do follow-up with their students.

Each music circle class took place over one _ session per week. In each class, Carol Larimore led students through a welcome song and discussed the character value they would learn about in the lesson. She would then sing and teach the students a song about that character value. Students would have time after the song to discuss real life situations where they had to use that character value and would listen to a puppet called “Booster” describe its perspective of the value. The lesson ended with a good-bye song.

Students would then spend the next 15-20 minutes journaling about the concept they learned that day. The classroom teacher would spend the next week (until the next music circle lesson) reinforcing the character value by talking about it during class meetings.

To measure students learning, our initial plan was for Eric Swihart and Alyson Noel-Swihart to conduct Pre- and Post-Tests of a random sample of students at each of the four participating schools in order to assess social emotional behavior and understanding, using the Music in Schools Today Social-Emotional Behavior Rubrics. Teaching artist and classroom teachers were to collect additional program artifacts in the form of photographs of student writing and drawing. However, as the residency and professional development progressed, we realized that logistically we could not successfully use the Music in Schools Today Social-Emotional Behavior Rubrics. (We do plan on using this assessment next year and are working now on how to implement it in an effective way). Likewise, our post assessments were not successfully implemented. Because the program took place during the end of the year, the assessments got pushed aside for other testing, and the teachers did not receive their posttest in time to administer to the students.

Results

Despite the difficulties with the pre- and post-assessments, some telling evidence of student learning was documented through the students’ journals and the teachers’ observations. (Note: All student work has been sent to the MIENC for documentation purposes.) Across the school sites, teachers noticed students consistently using the term “do-over” in the classroom and out on the playground. This term, introduced by the teaching artist Carol Larimore, was used when a student recognized he/she needed to correct a behavior. For example, if a student became frustrated and threw something across the room, the student who threw the object would stop and say, “I need to do a do-over... that wasn’t a good way to handle the situation.” This term allowed students to articulate what they needed to do without feeling ashamed for not being “perfect.” As more and more students and teachers articulated needing a “do-over,” students increasingly realized that everyone makes mistakes, and that every situation can be successfully addressed with calm reason and accountability.

In one class that discussed empathy, a student was describing how he had felt empathy for his neighbor when the neighbor's family member got shot and killed. The student voiced that he also had a family member killed by similar violence. Later, when the class was over, the student came over to talk to Carol and revealed that he needed to do a do-over. He confided to her that he had lied about his empathy story and that he was sorry. When asked why he lied, he said it was because he wanted his friends to think of him as tough. Carol applauded his bravery for telling the truth. When Carol told the student's teacher about what happened, the teacher said, "I don't think that student wouldn't have come forward to tell the truth had it not been for the concept of 'do-overs' that this program has reinforced so well."

The professional development model is one that we intend to use next year as well. Teachers reported in their final reflections that the introduction games that were presented were used by most teachers. Likewise, having discussions with Carol regarding the curriculum was very helpful. Teachers across the district shared how they integrated the program into their classrooms through student made journals and art murals. The professional development time allowed teachers to "borrow" each other's ideas and implement them in their classrooms. Teachers also found the theoretical approach to the program interesting as well. Teachers understood the importance of administering pre and posttests and documenting student learning. Many teachers "revised" questions as they became more interested in seeing the implications that music had on a social-emotional level. Feedback from the principals at the three sites informed us that we need to include the principals in the professional development. As one principal said, "We're glad to have the program at our school, but I don't know enough about it to tell others about it."

Another exciting result of this program was that the principal of Brookfield, Adam Taylor, became very excited about the concept of music plus music integration. He along with a classroom teacher and the music specialist from his school accompanied a team from Thornhill Elementary and El Dorado Elementary on a site visit to Morrison Elementary, a LLSN Site in Norwalk, California. At this site visit, his team planned how to introduce the concept of music integration to his staff in the fall. Likewise, Mr. Taylor viewed the culminating event of the 2009 Jazz and Democracy Unit and would like to do something similar with his fifth graders.

Reflections/Conclusions

We felt that the success of this program and buy-in from the staff of each school was attributed to the professional development that the participating teachers received. They were supported throughout this project and were able to articulate their findings with each other at these meetings. Next year we plan to invite the principals to participate in this program, an idea that was simply overlooked in our pilot year. Many of the principals wanted to be more involved but simply couldn't because they weren't familiar enough with the program. Further, next year our assessment plan will be more carefully planned and implemented.

Likewise, the OUSD's district coordinator of the SecondStep Program (a Violence Prevention Curriculum that teaches students in grades K-3 how to deal with conflict) came to observe a

lesson and saw the connections it made to Second Step. This fall, the district will talk about how to bring this program to other sites.

We have also learned that teachers would like this program to run for a full year or at least to start it at the beginning of the school year. Teachers were impressed with the students understanding of important and difficult social concepts such as perseverance, cooperation, wisdom, and obedience, and reported that their students often used this vocabulary throughout the rest of the year. Therefore, we are excited about continuing this program next year and look forward to extending it into more sites to further synergistic relationships among public schools, arts organizations, higher education institutions, and school reform groups to support music's role as an agent of change in school practices, applied research, and education policy.

References

Larimore, Carol. (1991) Music is a Gift of Love. Heart to Heart Music Company, Santa Rosa, CA, <http://successfulkids.net/>

Swihart, A. et al. (2008) Emerging from the Fog of Music Integration in the MLL Sourcebook, <http://musiclearningleadership.com/book/2008/07/case-study-thornhill/>

Appendix



Carol Larimore and students from the first grade present the songs they learned for an assembly for the school. Kindergarten teachers were extremely excited about this program and want to be a part of it next year.



Carol teaches students how to make successful choices by picking flowers in the garden of successful choices?: self-control, respect, honesty, integrity, perseverance, etc.



Participating classroom teachers participate in a musical activity they will use in their classroom the following week. These teachers participated in 3 one-hour music- integrated professional development sessions.

Teacher Reflections

Raising the Teachers' Level of Discourse – an interview with Eric Swihart

An interesting debate occurred several years ago, when Thornhill classroom teachers were trying to decide how to teach character values through song. Some would ask: “When elementary school children sing songs about character values, are they actually LEARNING the character values, or are they only learning ABOUT them?” Big difference! Others would say that “getting together and singing IS the goal. In other words, the activity itself was the end goal. Apparently this was more than just an argument of semantics. The teachers’ passionate enthusiasm for authentic teaching and learning experiences moved them to have creative, professional debates about music for music’s sake and music’s ability to teach other things. And, apparently, what exactly we were aiming for, was yet to be decided.

Putting the values into practice -- an interview with Eric Swihart

One Friday, I went to Burckhalter Elementary School to deliver some music stands. Carol happened to be teaching when I got there, so I stopped by to visit. Carol was talking about ‘appreciation’ with the kids; apparently, that was the “flower” for the day. And, after sitting there for a couple of minutes, I felt a need to share a personal experience with the class. I asked Carol if it was OK, and then I asked the class if they would let me tell my story. They said OK,

so I told them. I had had a major concert the evening before, one which involved ten middle school and high school orchestras performing individually and then collectively at the end of the concert. I had organized the program, laid out the graphics, printed it, and brought it to the school, along with two tympani and four stage lights that I mounted in the balcony of the auditorium so that the conductor and the musicians standing in front of the stage—an area where there is no stage lighting—could see their music while performing the final piece. All this I did with no mention or thank you whatsoever. That's not the reason I did it, of course, but a little thank you can go a long way for someone who has worked so hard to make an event happen. So, that's exactly what I explained to the students that morning. And, after listening quite intently for the entirety of my story, in unison they all responded: "THANK YOU!" No one prompted them to do this, although I think it's obvious that Carol's song about appreciation and her conversation with the kids definitely had a major influence.

The principal "buy-in" from the very beginning. Why were they so eager to bring this new program to their school? – an interview with Eric Swihart

I'm not sure why I created this expectation in my mind, but I really expected more resistance and apprehension from the principals at the start of the program. One year ago, before the start of this project, four schools signed on to participate in this program. But then one of the schools got "re-constituted—thanks to No Child Left Behind—and two of the four schools were going to get new principals. So we identified a new school to replace the reconstituted school, and we approached the two new principals with the guidelines and proposed outcomes of our program. Not only were they willing to implement this program, they volunteered their schools as PD site, and volunteered to use some of their school site funds to share the cost of the student songbooks and CD's.

Why scale out this program? –an interview with SallyAnn Tomlin, Principal, Thornhill Elementary

Honestly, one of the main reasons for implementing this program was to get classroom teachers from multiple school sites talking to each other about how to create dynamic and innovative music-integrated programs to meet ALL the needs of their students. Not just the academic needs, but also the social/emotional needs as well. This was also an opportunity to establish new contacts and relationships at schools that have recently been underserved musically. This program set out to accomplish these two goals.